1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

621 they recognize Sekulu Sikīlilē, the elder of the largest unit, as the village headman. Only in his village is there a dancing floor [345] (*ocīlā*),[1] which is the centre of village life, social, legal, and recreational. As the name indicates, it is first and foremost a place for recreation, but here also religious functions are held since they involve so much dancing and drinking, and here formal cases are tried. The *ocīlā* is the heart of the village.

345 *The Men's Club-House.* Ngendo does not have that other important Umbundu institution, the Men's Club House (*onjango*).[2] The *onjango* is, or was, hardly less important than the *ocīlā*. Perhaps before it fell to its present state of disuse, its place was of even greater importance, for in the *onjango* all the men, youths [262] and boys gathered day by day for the evening meal. From all the kitchens came baskets of stiff corn porridge (*iputa*), and dishes of relish (*ombelela*)[3] which all shared, from the most honoured guest or the village elders, down to the naked, ash-whitened little boys just old enough (say from seven or eight years) to leave the kitchens [574] to their mothers and sisters. In the *onjango* guests were entertained, judicial cases of lesser import were settled, the day's work and gossip discussed, and youth was educated by precept and example in nearly everything from traditional history to etiquette. The *onjango* was dining-room, living-room, court, school, hotel, and club, all in one. For some of the Ovimbundu it continues to function. Upon inquiry I found that in all Kasonge there were hardly ten villages where the *onjango* existed and retained its [466] former functions. The reasons which my informants assigned are that the demands for road work (in the immediate region), for contract labour (involving absences of from six months to two years), and the difficulty of securing tax-money, did not leave the leisure required for the common meal in the *onjango*. When I 345 made wider inquiries as to localities where the *onjango* now exists 178 and retains its former functions, it seems that this institution is widely decadent. According to my information, the regions where it continues to function are chiefly in Ngalangi, in Viye, and

104 [1] *Ocīlā* comes from the verb *oku cīlā*, to dance.

[2] *Onjango* has been traced to the verb *oku vangula*, to converse, but I am doubtful of this derivation. It has been called 'The Palaver House', but this is an evident misnomer, for the *onjango* is much more than that.

[3] *Ombelela* is a word to cover any dish which may be eaten with the porridge staple. It may be meat, beans, mushrooms, or greens, and is preferred with gravy into which pieces of the stiff porridge may be dipped (*oku miña*).

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

867 spit, nor toy with anything in his hand. Should his knees knock together, *puaki puaki*,[1] when he runs, they will warn him (against it), saying, Lest when you are grown you may retain the habit and may not be able to walk properly as everyone walks. When a visitor comes into the hut to visit with his parents, while they talk, the well-taught child does not interrupt but is strictly silent, for it is taboo. Otherwise, it would be said, Their child has been taught as by a widow,[2] interrupting when people converse. But if he is spoken to, he must reply with care and with respect to the person speaking, saying, Yes sir (*nã oco*); Yes, thank you (*ã kuku*, lit. yes, great-grandfather!); Yes indeed, thank you (*oco muēlē a kuku*); Sir Lion (*nã Hosi*); Ah, Sir Lord (*Nã a Ñalã*); Ah, Master of the Paws (*nã a Cime-cakasa*).[3]

'Should the elders send him (somewhere), he will obey quickly. He will also imitate the elders in everything. Then they may say of him, This boy now begins to have the habits of adults. They may begin to liken him to someone who died a long time ago. Those who have known his family may say, This child completes so-and-so (*Ngandi*), surely he is likely to be the inheritor of so-and-so (*Kapiñalã ka Ngandi*), perhaps it is his great-grandfather.[4]

'These then are the habits which belong to being grown-up and should a person omit them, people's words will have no meaning for him, and he will have lost his chance.'

From the foregoing it will be seen that a child of about eight is supposed to know his social status and all the etiquette which pertains to it. Where the *onjango* (men's club) still functions as an institution, there the boys learn much of the Umbundu way of life, for there they eat daily in company with all the men and boys of the village. Children are supposed to learn 'table-manners' by watching and imitating their elders. In the *onjango* the hierarchy of age is observed, honoured guests and old men being served first, and so on down the line. Guests are provided with individual servings, but it is hardly proper for one to finish up everything. Any one of the boys will count it a privilege to do that for him. The greater the guest, the greater the honour to finish his plate. A guest of special category, as, for example, the king, who is unable

[1] *Puaki, puaki*, imitation of the sound made by knees knocking together.

[2] It is proverbial that a widow (alone) is unable to bring up her child. Cf. the proverb: *Ocimbumba ka ci longi omõlã*. 'A widow does not educate a child.'

[3] The last three are addressed only to a king or a chief; the others to any older person of either sex.

[4] The reference is to reincarnation.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

of the girl by her husband, and if she were not a virgin he took a hot stick from the fire and burned a hole through her loin cloth. "The girl began to cry, but she had to take the burned cloth to her mother." In such an instance there does not seem to be an idea of guilt. The husband had accepted something that was damaged, and the payment of a pig by the girl's parents reunited the two young people. In former days, also at present, there are boy and girl companions who sleep together, supposedly without having sexual connections, although they may be seventeen years of age. The girl calls the boy *ombaisi*, and he calls her by the same name. The Ovimbundu understand something of the physiology of conception; the woman is, however, regarded as only a receiving vessel. "The man puts something into her which grows."

Husband and wife do not sleep in the same bed during the wife's menstrual period; the wife sleeps on a mat at the side of her husband's bed. A woman who is menstruating never cooks food, but women give mutual aid in this matter. A man with more than one wife sleeps either four nights or seven nights with each; the four-night cycle is more usual than the seven-night cycle among the Ovimbundu. Each wife has a separate hut and kitchen. There is no wife lending, but a visitor may be provided with a widow or even with an unmarried girl. Then the man would have to pay the woman.

Ngonga was able to give information with regard to homosexuality. "There are men who want men, and women who want women." Ngonga says he has heard people talk about it, and "they think this very bad." A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman. The medicine-man will sometimes dress as a woman. Ngonga, who has seen a man dress as a woman, stated that the man arranged his cloth like that of a woman, put palm oil on his hair, and joined the women to pound corn on the rocks. "The other people laughed and spoke bad words to him. His brother, father, and uncle beat him," but without producing reformation.

DIVORCE

There are many grounds on which a man may secure a divorce, but it does not follow that divorce is frequent. On the contrary the evidence indicates that the majority of difficulties are overcome by a compromise between the relations of the husband and those of the wife. The main causes of dissatisfaction with a wife are want of ability in cultivating her garden, physical weakness, a habit of thieving from the gardens of other women, incompetence in cooking,

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbu-du FP13

The hare is not carried over the shoulder, but has a ceremonial conveyance slung on poles (*owanda*) which are supported on the shoulders of two or even four men. 796 643

Laying the evil of a village on a goat, which is then driven out to die, is an Umbundu custom. The scapegoat ceremony has a cleansing function similar in purpose to the rekindling of fire for the community. Cavazzi pictured and described the scapegoat ceremony in the seventeenth century, and Ngonga informed me that he saw the rite twenty years ago. 783

PROHIBITIONS AND OMENS

There is a taboo against killing *oka kuhu*, which is the yellow-backed duiker. When Ngonga was sick he was forbidden to eat the flesh of the duiker (*ombambi*); neither is this flesh to be eaten by people who suffer from dizziness. In former days women were not allowed to eat eggs. The flesh of sheep and goats is said to be indigestible for children between the ages of three and six years. The flesh of the lion, leopard, and hyena is forbidden as food for the king, but other people may eat it. The king is in fact forbidden to eat the flesh of any animal which has paws; neither may he eat flesh of the bush buck. A medicine-man must not eat flesh of a dog except before a ceremony for curing the sick. The taboo against dog's flesh applies also to the diet of a king. 262 [643]

A woman must not step over the legs of a male, neither must a man step over the legs of a woman; for to do so causes weakness of the knees. A man or woman may step over the legs of a child. 784

Omens are numerous. It is unfortunate to see a snake holding a frog, and the person who observes this should go to the medicine-man at once. When going to a village to be tried by the chief it is bad to meet some one who is carrying a bark rope, as this indicates binding and punishment. If a person who is setting out from home meets a woman carrying corn meal or any other white substance, he or she must take a little of the meal, whiten the face, and all will be well. A fly in the mouth is a good sign, because the fly knows where meat is to be obtained and is trying to lead the way. 787

A stranger visiting a village is pleased when a dog is the first animal to enter the guest house. Dogs are fed, so the entry of a dog is a sign that the visitor will receive food. On the contrary, the appearance of a goat is a bad omen, because goats are not fed; they pick up a frugal living as best they can. Other prohibitions and omens have been mentioned in discussing the pregnancy of women. [574]

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

631 764 funerals (though these burials could be undertaken by the cross-cousins of the deceased). When *vakwatjisoko* came to their partner-chiefdom for a funeral they had the right to steal small live-stock, such as chickens, or pigeons, but not cattle, goats, or [837] pigs. An *ukwatjisoko* could sleep with the wives of his *vakwatjisoko* partners without being sued for damages.[68]

631 [602] The ties of kinship and affinity crossed the boundaries of the sub-chiefdoms and even of the kingdoms.[69] The members [463] [574] of the three spirit-protected professions, blacksmithing, divining, and hunting recognized obligations of hospitality to co-professionals from other parts of the country.[70] Again the caravans were so large that they must have involved people [437] from many sub-chiefdoms, which presupposes a wide range of contacts.

182 It may be said that the picture given here is contradictory and inadequate. How can the existence of large kingdoms be reconciled to the extreme insecurity described by old men? How do the wealthy caravan organizers fit into the political system? What sort of politics were there in the kingdoms? It is not easy to answer these questions owing to the lack of evidence, and, probably, because the kingdoms were already in decline during the latter part of the rubber trade period. Indeed, the impression that accounts of the Ovimbundu in the nineteenth century give is that of adventure, battle, commerce, migration —a vigorous rather than a stable society.[71]

61 114 The kinship system is perhaps the field of Umbundu society which has aroused most interest among anthropologists. Childs and Hastings have written much that is interesting on the old double-descent grouping but as, with the kinship system, the form has been described rather than the functioning and it is

[68] Informants. The account in Childs, pp. 114–15 differs considerably. For this institution elsewhere in Angola see Estermann, 'Clans et alliances de clans', *Anthropos*, 1952.

[69] Childs, p. 54.

[70] Informants.

[71] Magyar describes the king and his courtiers as being extremely despotic towards the villagers, and states that their despotism depended on their having a standing military force called 'Sons of the Elephant' (pp. 278–80). Later accounts do not mention this, and Childs notes (p. 209) that at the height of the rubber trade it was more difficult for the kings to recruit armies for their wars.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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for the bride's village. Here they may be greeted with formal speeches of welcome in Portuguese, a usage copied from the reception of missionaries.

One only turns up to a wedding if one has been invited, and not everybody who is a kinsman living in the neighbourhood is invited. Nor is there any marked distinction between kin and non-kin in the ceremony, except for the ending of avoidances and the recognition of the father's sister, who is recompensed for her services as nursemaid. Village membership is significantly recognized in the distribution of food, and the sending of the party to the bride's home to represent the bridegroom's village.

Umbundu marriage is virilocal, although a certain number of marriages are within the village. Apart from such marriages, it seems to be rare to find a man settling in a village because his wife has kin there.

Although during the early months of the marriage the bridegroom's mother may supervise the bride's work, the individual household is essentially an independent unit[13] and was not even in the past merged with other household units to form a 'grandfamily'. This independence is not isolation. I have only a very few times seen houses with any sort of compound about them. Much of domestic life, eating, working, resting, talking, may be done out of doors in front of the house. Paying visits is a great feature of village life especially when the day's work is over, although there is also a term *oku pasula*, to visit in the morning, referring to what are usually just short calls, involving the exchange of greetings. Perhaps the opportunity of calling and being called on is one of the factors maintaining the village as a social unit. The idea that a man should not eat with his wife still survives to some extent so that questions on this topic receive contradictory answers. Observation shows that even among the men who travelled on the caravans, eating with one's wife is the general practice.

One of the most striking features of Umbundu domestic life is the close companionship which exists between husband and wife and which is unquestionably a modern development.[14]

[13] See Magyar, pp. 281–3.

[14] The role of the *Ondjango* as described by Childs and Hastings indicates that a man's normal companions both for eating and recreation were other men.